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CLAUSEWITZ FOR MODERN READERS: A REVISION

BY

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Book Two, "On the Theory of War" from On War presents Carl von Clausewitz's approach to building a theory of war, and so provides a foundation for the rest of On War. In Book Two, Clausewitz argues that theory should focus on combat, excluding the raising and maintaining of forces, because it is combat alone which decides issues of war. He also argues that the role of theory is not to provide doctrine for easy application in battle, but to be a framework for soldiers to develop their own knowledge and understanding of war. He puts special emphasis on close, critical analysis of military history as a way of determining the proper relationship of means and ends in war. His assertion that war is but a tool of politics is perhaps the best known expression of his concern with means and ends, a concern found throughout On War.

This paper revises Book Two, using contemporary language and examples from recent military history, to help modern readers apply Clausewitz's concepts to their own studies of history and experiences of war.

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CLAUSEWITZ FOR MODERN READERS: A REVISION

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

Clausewitz is notoriously hard to read. B.H. Liddell Hart remarked that, "only a mind already developed by years of study and reflection can dissolve Clausewitz into digestible bits."[1] Martin Kitchen added that, "it has indeed long been Clausewitz's misfortune to be too philosophical for the practitioners of war and too practical for the philosophers."[2]

This paper is intended to make Clausewitz easier to read. I have attempted to clarify the presentation of his arguments by modernizing the text and using examples from recent military history to illustrate Clausewitz's ideas, as if he were writing today. I have avoided judging the validity or appropriateness of anything he says, and readers may well find things in the text they disagree with. I am more interested in helping readers apply their own experiences in and thoughts about war to Clausewitz's theories. On War, after all, is an invitation to soldiers to think about their profession.

I have revised Book Two of On War, "On the Theory of War." I chose this part of On War because Clausewitz uses it to explain what he thinks a theory of war should do for the soldier, as well as his approach to developing such a theory. Book Two addresses central themes such as the relationship of means to ends in war,

the use of theory in self education, and methods of analyzing military history. Clausewitz describes the need for a theory which will let us examine what happens in war, and why. He sees theory as an aid to judgement, rather than as doctrine by which the commander should wage war.

I have retained the basic structure and tone of Book Two. Otherwise, I have revised it drastically: I have changed its language, reduced its length, and removed almost all of the Napoleonic references, replacing them with more modern examples. I have combined thoughts which Clausewitz spreads out across Book Two, and have amplified some ideas he touches on only lightly. In a few cases I use endnotes to make points of my own, or to present ideas from the original text which otherwise would interrupt the flow of the revision. In other cases I stay close to Clausewitz's formulations. Thus, where today we talk about ends, ways, and means as components of strategy, Clausewitz uses just ends and means. I retain "ends and means;" readers can add "ways" to the combination easily for themselves.

In the revisions I have eliminated many of the nuances of Clausewitz's arguments. The 1976 edition of On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, which is the basis for my revisions, and books and articles listed in the bibliography, give detailed examinations of Clausewitz's ideas.

Book Two

On the Theory of War

Chapter One

Classifications of the Art of War

One goal of On War is to see if the many living conflicts of war are subject to general laws, and whether such laws can guide our actions. That is, can we devise a theory of war? A useful theory in fact is possible, and this chapter presents a narrow definition of the art of war as the basis for developing theory.[3] Definitions and distinctions are important elements of any theory, and figure heavily in this and succeeding chapters.

The Art of War is Combat

One of the first things to do in building any theory is to break the object under study into its component parts, grouping together the similar and separating the dissimilar elements. In looking at the art of war we can break things into two general categories:

-- Combat. That is, the actual engagement of troops in battle.

-- Maintenance and administration. That is, creating the means by which we conduct battle; raising, equipping, and training the army.

The real art of war is based on combat itself, because everything else just provides the means to fight. As important as these may be, we must stay focused on combat, because it is fighting itself which decides the issue.

Elements of Combat

We can in turn break combat into at least two main elements: tactics and strategy.

-- Tactics is the planning and execution of engagements, with the objective of winning discrete victories.

-- Strategy is the coordination of engagements, or sometimes just the threat of them, to reach the objective of the war.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships of the elements of war.

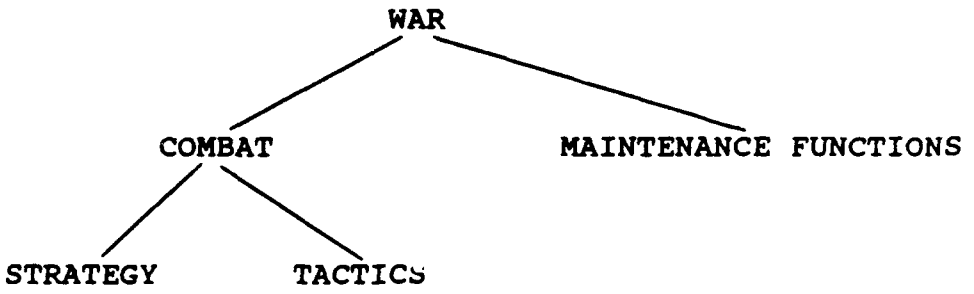

Figure 1. Elements of War.

We also could consider operational art, the level of war between tactics and strategy, consisting of major military actions --campaigns -- which serve the ends of stategy. World

War Two was replete with campaigns, but it would be hard to find the application of operational art in the 1989 invasion of Panama. Here, tactics served strategy directly. So, for the purpose of the theory of war, we can keep our focus on tactics and strategy, because they apply across the entire continuum of operations, from low-intensity to global war.

While the engagement is central to combat, because it is the actual clash of troops, some "supporting" activities can be part of combat because they involve the use of troops and lead to fighting. Most important of these are maneuvers.[4]

A maneuver of troops during an engagement obviously is part of fighting, even if weapons are not used -- the troops move to where they can fire on the enemy. Likewise, maneuvers made while expecting to meet the enemy, such as would happen in AirLand Operations, can be considered part of combat. The organization of a unit on the march can be a preliminary disposition for combat, as in Soviet tactics.[5]

A maneuver can be an element of strategy if it is not part of an engagement. The movement of United States forces to Saudi Arabia during Desert Shield can be considered a strategic maneuver. It determined when, where, and with what forces engagements would be fought, but was not part of the fighting itself. Maneuver can be a tool by which strategy creates engagements, but we should remember that the engagements produce victories, not the movements which lead to the engagements.

Elements of Maintenance

Of the maintenance functions, supply is the one which most directly affects fighting. Because it does not normally affect a specific engagement, supply is more a part of strategy than of tactics; nothing is more common than to find supply affecting the strategy of a campaign or war. In October 1973 the Israelis and Arabs almost ran out of ammunition and had to be resupplied by the United States and Soviet Union, respectively.[6] In 1990 and 1991, just getting enough supplies and equipment to Saudi Arabia was a critical consideration for the United States in executing Desert Shield and Desert Storm.[7] And cutting off supplies to the Iraqis was an equally important part of overall Coalition strategy.

Other functions are further removed from the use of troops in combat. Although vital to an army's welfare, at any give time medical services affect only a small portion of its men While equipment maintenance takes place routinely, it rarely matters in strategy. Of course, in any individual case these may be of decisive importance: in Desert Storm, maintenance was critical in ensuring the availability of combat equipment for use against Iraq. But in general these aspects of war do not deserve the same serious weight in the theory of war as does combat itself.

Ends and Means in Warfare

Whether we take a broad or a narrow view of war, we can see a fundamental relationship between all of its elements. Each is

a means to an end, which is in turn a means to a still higher end. Maintenance and administration are the means which generate the forces which fight. These in turn are the means of combat. In tactics, engagements are the means to the end of victories. In strategy, victories are the means to the end of the peace which follows the war. Figure 2 illustrates the relationships. The whole of the art of war revolves around properly matching ends and means -- objectives and how to attain them.

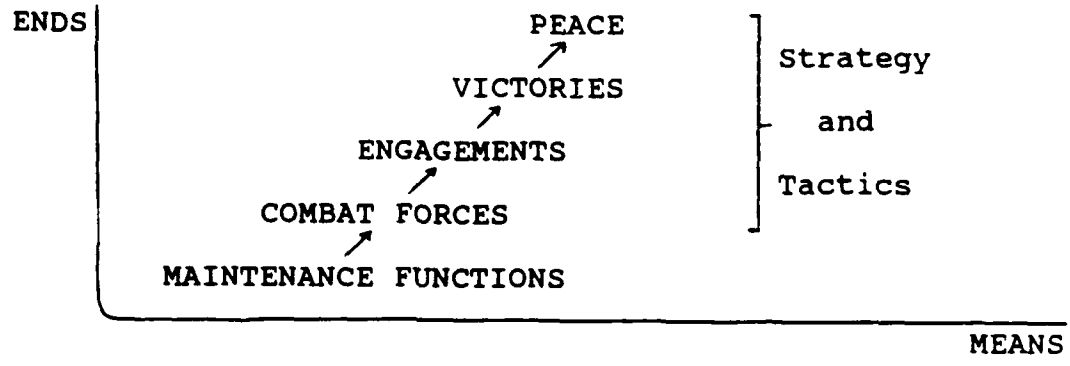

Figure 2. Ends and Means in Warfare.

Summary

The theory of war depends on the fact that we can split war's activities into two major categories: preparations for combat, and actual combat. The former involves the creation and maintenance of forces. The latter -- the pure art of war -- involves the use of these means to attain the objectives of the war. This latter, narrow sense of the art of war is concerned with the engagement -- fighting -- and takes all other considerations as given. The art of war in this narrow sense in

turn must be broken down into tactics and strategy. The first is concerned with individual engagements. The second is concerned with the use of engagements to reach the objective of the war, which is peace.

These definitions matter, because a primary purpose of any theory is to clarify concepts and ideas. So while it is easy to see places where supply and combat or tactics and strategy overlap, it is crucial to recall the differences between them when one starts to study actual campaigns and wars. It is also crucial to remember that each end we attain is but a means to the next end, until we reach peace.

Chapter Two

On the Theory of War

The theory of war should be a guide for study, not a set of rules for conducting war. Theory should illuminate the relationships between ends and means as they are in reality. Some writers have constructed doctrinaire theories intended to be keys to victory on the battlefield. These theories are fallacious: they tend to ignore the human dimensions and uncertainties of war; they conceal rather than expose the links between means and ends. Any workable theory of war must include both material and moral factors in war.

The goal of study is knowledge, and this must translate into capability on the battlefield. The commander's knowledge must be so well absorbed that it is practically instinctive. Theory is intended to give thinking people a frame of reference to develop this knowledge and capability, rather than provide a precise path to take on the battlefield.

Doctrinaire Theories of War

Over time war has progressed from medieval hand-to-hand fighting to the more organized, complex form we have today. At the same time, people have tried to develop absolute principles,

rules, or even systems for conducting war. Unfortunately, these often just limit our ability to think about war. The problem is that war branches out in almost all directions and has no definite limits. Comprehending the subject is difficult, and theorists have tended to evade the difficulty by directing their principles and systems only at physical matters and unilateral activity. We cannot reconcile such systems with reality.

Some theorists have concentrated on:

-- Numerical superiority. Emphasizing numbers in combination with calculations of space and time, theorists could develop neat predictions of who would win. Obviously, reducing the whole of the art of war to having numerical superiority at a certain time in a certain place is an oversimplification that cannot stand the test of reality. Many outnumbered forces have won battles.

-- Supply. Presuming that getting supplies to the army is the final arbiter of war lets the theorist make nice calculations, but is one-sided and unrealistic.

-- Base. Von Bulow came up with the concept of the base, which relates feeding the army, replacing men and equipment, and keeping open lines of communication and retreat. He reduced all of this to the base line, the angle the army takes as it moves forward. While the base is a necessary concept, appearing in military textbooks well into the twentieth century, von Bulow took it too

far and turned the concepts of war into geometry, contrary to common sense.[8]

-- Interior lines. Jomini's concept of attacking first one front and then another has proven effective, and at least is based on what war is all about -- the engagement.[9] But it is still a one-sided, geometrical theory that cannot govern reality.[10]

These doctrines ignore the facts that war is not a series of unilateral actions, that war includes moral factors, and that war is an uncertain business. When these doctrines fail, and something in war happens beyond scientific control, theorists are reduced to saying that genius, which rises above all rules, solved the problem. Too bad for those of us who are not geniuses! The theorists leave us to crawl among their scraps of rules -- which geniuses can ignore or laugh at -- unequipped to deal with the reality of war. In fact, talent and genius are parts of war, and theory needs to take them into account, not exclude them just because they are not easily subject to scientific calculation.

Moral Factors in the Theory of War

Military activity is directed against not just calculable material forces, but also against moral forces, and the two cannot be separated. This makes theory extraordinarily difficult, because moral forces look different to each person. Nevertheless, experience shows that we can assess them with some

objectivity. Everyone knows the moral effects of an ambush or an attack on the flank or rear. Everyone is willing to take greater risks in the pursuit, because the enemy's back is turned and his courage is low.

Theory must take into account the fact that emotions pervade war. Envy and generosity, pride and humility, wrath and compassion -- all can be effective forces in war's drama. Hostility is a major factor. Theories that see war as an abstract trial of strength without emotions entering in are wrong. Hatred is a part of modern war; at least between nations, if not individuals. If a war started without hatred, then the fighting alone would stir it up: the Arab-Israeli conflict is fueled by such hatred. And if this did not happen, governments would try to generate hostility: witness the propaganda of the World Wars, where the sides went to great lengths to paint their opponents as evil, repugnant, and inferior.

Danger is another moral factor in war, generating fear and courage. Fear is concerned with physical survival, courage with moral survival. In war, courage does more than just neutralize danger: courage is a quality all on its own. The commander faces great demands on his courage because danger threatens not just himself but all of his soldiers and not just at one moment, but throughout the war.

Uncertainty is a major factor; in war information is unreliable most of the time. In war, all action takes place in a kind of twilight which often makes things seem more dangerous

than they really are. The situation is even worse when the enemy is from a widely different ethnic or cultural background, and thus harder to understand. For instance, throughout Desert Shield there was great concern over massive casualties which the Coalition might sustain in ground combat against the Iraqis. This was the direct result of uncertainty about the Coalition's own readiness, and about Iraqi capabilities and intentions -- were the Iraqis really prepared for a bloodbath in the "Mother of All Battles?" So, Coalition leaders tended to fear the worst, and planned accordingly.[11]

Finally, theory must take into account that war is a process of interaction between living forces. You can try to calculate a moral factor -- the effect that any action will have on the enemy -- but you must remember that the very nature of interaction will make calculations difficult. Judging how the enemy will behave is largely a matter of your own experience and talent. A rulebook for the commander is less useful here than anywhere else in war.

Theory as a Guide to Study

Theory should not be a manual for action, but a way to study things that happen often, so that you do not have to work through all of the material each time that you examine a new case. Theory guides self-study and trains judgement, allowing you to make decisions, not providing the decisions themselves. This kind of theory will not create doctrines which conflict with the

reality of battle. Ignorant, limited people excuse their congenital incompetence by the difference between doctrinaire theory and reality; if the real situation was not covered in doctrine, they cannot be blamed for failure.

A central question of theory is how the commander uses means to reach ends. In tactics, the means are combat forces; the end is victory. In strategy, the means are tactical victories; the end is peace. Use theory to find those means which lead most directly to peace. Stick with the essentials, examining means to the depth that common sense dictates: knowing how a tank is produced is not crucial to understanding its role in combat.

Knowledge in War

Focusing on means and ends -- forces and victory in tactics, victories and peace in strategy -- allows theory to simplify and reduce what you need to know to conduct war. In fact, the great commanders succeeded because they kept their attention on great ends, and avoided getting caught up in petty details.

What commanders need to know varies from level to level, of course. The higher their position, the greater and more comprehensive are their objectives, and hence what they must know. Senior commanders must be familiar with higher affairs of state and policy. They must know current issues and leading personalities. They must understand the virtues and defects of those whom they command. They must understand how forces operate. They must make sound judgements. Many who served with

the greatest distinction in the lower ranks turned out barely mediocre in the higher ranks, because their intellects were not adequate to the task.

No great commander ever had a limited intellect. Great commanders gain their knowledge by applying talented judgement to the observation of man and matter; by reflection, study, and thought; by looking for the essence of things. Life itself is a source of lessons, and while experience alone will never produce an Einstein, it may well bring forth a MacArthur.

Commanders must transform their knowledge into genuine capability. Other professions can rely on books and calculations, things external to the person. But in war, knowledge must be completely absorbed, because continual change on the battlefield and the need to respond to it compel commanders to carry the whole of their knowledge with them. They must always be ready to make the appropriate decision, quickly, and without abandoning their convictions. Their knowledge must be so well internalized that it almost ceases to exist in a separate, objective way, and becomes more like an instinct.

Summary

It is a mistake to build a theory of war which guides your every action and provides cookbook recipies for success. Such theories routinely ignore the fact that war is waged by people who react to each other, not by people acting against objects. Such theories ignore the fact that war is waged under conditions

of great uncertainty. Such theories obscure the relationships of ends and means. When something happens that is not covered by such theories, it must be the result of genius -- some sort of miracle.

In fact, moral forces -- emotions, danger, uncertainty -- have enormous impact on war, and theory must include this. In doing so, theory provides a point of departure for self-study. It provides a way to focus on essentials as you seek ways to obtain victories and from these, peace.

It is furthermore imperative to stick to the essentials because in war everything one knows must be at the fingertips. All too often, there is no time to study before making a decision. The higher the level of command, the more important it is to focus on great ends and to ignore petty details. Senior leaders have comprehensive objectives, and must have a broad understanding of policy as well as their own art. The higher the command, the greater are the demands on the commander's intellect; a workable theory of war helps develop it.

Chapter Three

Critical Analysis

When we study war, one thing we try to do is reach a point of incontrovertible truth, often about the actions of some commander in a specific situation. This is extraordinarily hard. In war, facts and motives tend to be unknown; in war, it is extemely difficult to trace cause and effect. For these reasons, mere narration of battles and campaigns is not enough to get to the truth underlying them, and is not enough to let us apply theory to practical life.

Critical analysis is the application of theoretical truths to actual events. It is the way to bridge the gap between theory and practice, to find the links between cause and effect, and to train oneself to make judgements about war. Critical analysis gives us a way to tell if means are appropriate to the intended military and political ends of a war. There are three elements in the critical approach:

-- Research, or discovering facts and interpreting issues in question.

-- Critical analysis, or tracing effects back to causes.

-- Criticism, or evaluating commanders' actions and giving praise or blame.

The last two matter here, because they increase our understanding of how war works. When we analyze wars, we cannot stop halfway, but must examine everything down to the basic elements. We must try and reach the point where our arguments are convincing and cannot be refuted, if criticism is to be instructive.

Practicing Critical Analysis

The critic's task is to investigate the relation of cause and effect and the appropriateness of means to ends. This is easy when they are closely linked. But in war, an effect can be the result of several causes. And in war, each end is a means to a higher end, until we reach the ultimate objective, which is peace. The critic must be ready to examine all of these relationships in the chain from the individual engagement to the whole of the war. It is easy to get lost in such a broad and complex field; the path of inquriy can get confused, and what seems acceptable at one level may be objectionable at another. The critic may need some talent to find links between things and to determine which among the countless events in war are the essential ones.

The critic also has to do more than just complain about some decision in war, without offering something better. The critic has to present well-reasoned alternatives, based on examination of what did or did not happen, and what might have happened. And, the critic has to offer proof that the alternative is

better. We have to examine each alternative in relation to the objective, and compare the faults and merits of each.

For example, in February 1814, Bonaparte amazed observers when he turned from Blucher after beating him, to fall on Schwarzenberg. But Bonaparte could have done better because if, instead of turning away from Blucher he had gone on hammering him back to the Rhine, the allies would never have made it to Paris. Why?

-- Generally, it is better to go on striking in the same direction. This saves time and exploits superiority.
-- Blucher's enterprising spirit made him the center of gravity, pulling the allies with him.
-- Blucher's defeat was so great he could not have stopped his retreat short of the Rhine.
-- No other success could have caused more alarm among the allies.

Methods of Criticism

One common method of criticism is to look at an event from the commander's viewpoint, trying to reconstruct why he made his particular decisions. Another is to study outcomes of the action, looking for links between ends and means. In general, the wider the view the critic can take, the better will be the analysis.

The Commander's Viewpoint The idea of putting yourself in the commander's place is to avoid judging him from an external

viewpoint, and to look for the reasons behind his decisions. However, the situation will never look the same for the analyst as it did for the participant. The critic will never get the full flavor -- the stress and danger -- of the commander's experience. And the critic will know from hindsight things the commander could not have known: as a rule, the critic will have better knowledge of both the action and its outcome. The critic will also have his own set of assumptions and conjectures filling in blanks and influencing his analysis. None of these things are easy to ignore.

But it is neither necessary nor desirable to identify completely with the commanders. These are often people of superior talent, and the critic would do well just to admire their success, the smooth unfolding of events, and the higher workings of their genius. To judge acts of talent the critic should take a comprehensive view and reduce his subjectivity to a minimum. So, if a critic points out that a leader like Lee made mistakes, it does not mean that the critic is acting superior, but that the commander also should have seen his errors.

Studying Outcomes The critic can study outcomes as well as actions themselves. The outcome of an action helps illuminate intangible factors such as daring and courage. Outcomes also show if means were right or wrong for reaching given ends. For example, when Bonaparte advanced on Moscow, the crucial question was whether or not taking it was the right means to reach his end, which was to make Tsar Alexander sue for peace.

If it were not, Bonaparte would have to turn back and suffer a strategic defeat. This of course happened: the outcome proves that despite the many other times he gauged his opponents well, Bonaparte misjudged Alexander's stedfastness and thus chose the wrong means to his end.

Desert Storm: An Example of Critical Analysis

How might one do critical analysis? The closing hours of the 1991 war against Iraq provide a subject for critical analysis. In this case, we can look at what happened and what might have happened. In doing this, we may take progressively wider views of the situation, to see whether ends and means were in consonance, and whether or not commanders made proper choices.

At the end of Desert Storm, some Iraqi forces south of the Euphrates had escaped destruction, as had ground forces to the north, and portions of the air force. It would seem reasonable for the United Nations Coalition to strike through Basrah and then to Baghdad to complete the annihilation of the Iraqi military and depose the Hussein government. Indeed, the Coalition commander, General Schwarzkopf, publically expressed his desire to continue the campaign, and accomplish these ends.

Would the Coalition have been capable of this? Ground forces had fought constantly for over four days and probably could not have kept up that tempo. The supply system was severely taxed. Commanders were concerned about getting bogged down in populated areas. They could have paused before

continuing, which would allow the Iraqis to recover somewhat. Or the Coalition could have pushed forward immediately, which probably would have entailed taking additional casualties as exhausted troops made mistakes and got caught in defensible urban terrain. Moreover, going into urban areas would have caused extensive civilian deaths, which the Coalition so far had succeeded in avoiding.

Would Hussein have continued to fight? We may never have a definitive answer to this question. But it is likely that Hussein would have kept the army in the field, rather than shelter and reserve it, as he did with the air force. While remaining army forces may not have been effective against the Coalition, they did at least show some resilience in reorganizing quickly to put down uprisings in Shia and Kurdish areas after the ceasefire. Perhaps more importantly, would Hussein have used chemical weapons if the Coalition was on the verge of bringing down his regime? While Coalition forces could have withstood such an attack, the potential for massive casualties and the resulting political consequences could have been daunting.

Even assuming that the Coalition could have pressed forward, and that Iraqi forces would continue to crumble and not resort to chemical weapons, would continuing the attack fit the Coalition's strategic ends? The United Nations' stated aim was the expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait. Destroying Iraqi power and unseating the government would go well beyond this, and to go on fighting long after freeing Kuwait probably would have caused the Coalition to

fracture. Any forces which continued to operate against Iraq would have much less political support and would face unfavorable public opinion around the world.

What would have been the value of such a victory to the Coalition? Iraq may have splintered into Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish areas. The Shiite area likely would align with Iran. The Kurds would press neighboring countries for the creation of an independent Kurdistan. In all cases, the regional balance of power would shift directly to Iran. That the Coalition was not ready for these outcomes is shown by the absolute absence of military support to the post-ceasefire uprisings in Iraq.

So, despite having the opportunity to finish off what they considered a regional troublemaker, Coalition members held to more limited aims. If members had an unstated aim of unseating Hussein, they kept it quiet and did not pursue it, presumably becasue it was not worth the military or political costs. As it was, the Coalition used the right means to their stated ends, and correctly stopped at that point.

Problems in Critical Analysis

The brief example above shows that critical analysis is a powerful way to study war, one which lets us get to the heart of issues. But it can have drawbacks. Sometimes, all of our research might not be enough to bridge the gap between known effect and unknown cause. We can get into serious trouble if we try to stretch a few known facts to cover effects. Also, in war

effects seldom result from a single cause; we have to be alert to correctly assessing each identifiable case. All of this inquiry can lead us into a labyrinth of detail, and it will be almost impossible to give each point the attention it demands. For instance, one of the best examples of critical analysis, Coddington's study of the Gettysburg campaign, fills well over 800 pages, of which 233 are references, and still contains unknowns and unresolved issues.[12]

Then there are some simple stylistic problems. One is that many critics use really obscure language. War is a complex subject, and it gets harder the closer we look at it. It is important for the critic to use the simplest language possible. Too many use flowery writing to hide the fact that their theories and arguments are unsupportable. Sometimes critics do not even know what they are thinking, and just soothe themselves with obscure words which would not satisfy them if expressed in plain speech.

Another problem is that critics often write to show off their erudition, and tend to misuse historical examples. Too often, critics cite a single fact in passing to support the most contradictory views. Pile up enough bad examples and you can confuse the reader without proving anything. The light of day shows this for the trash it is.

One of the jobs of theory is to help sort through facts and details, and guide the critic in his study. Theory is an aid to judgement, not a law or standard. But some critics limit their

analysis with doctrines that are as narrow and binding as formal bodies of law. Thus, Liddell Hart "proved" that all decisive victories resulted from the "indirect approach," ignoring or discounting contradictory evidence.[13] Theory used as doctrine is as dangerous to the critic as it is to the soldier.

Summary

Critical analysis gives us a way to find the links between cause and effect, and to judge whether means and ends are appropriate to each other. The critic studies acts of talented commanders, taking the most comprehensive view possible, examining what did and what could have happened, following the chain to its logical, provable conclusion.

The critic must remember that the purpose of analysis is the same as that of theory in general -- to guide the commander's education, not to put tools into his bag. The critic needs to stick to the point and keep his language simple. Otherwise, soldiers will ignore the critic, and all of his work will be of little use to those who have to manage things in battle by the light of their native wit.

Chapter Four

Method and Routine

One of the great practical aspects of a theory of war based on study and criticism is that it trains the senior commander to use his brain and avoid routine. The saying that armies prepare to fight the previous rather than the next war points directly to the power that "blind routine" can have on even the highest reaches of leadership.

This does not mean that there is no place for laws, principles, rules, regulations, and the like. They work best in tactics. For instance, we can say that, as a rule, we should not send tanks into combat unsupported by infantry. In this case, routine acts as a kind of shortcut, something that allows us to avoid having to make individual decisions in every circumstance. We are saying that we have seen this situation before, and we know what does and does not work in it, so we apply the solution without having to think all the way through it.

In fact, it is inevitable that we apply routines in war, because all too often we have to make decisions on little or no information; either the enemy has carefully hidden his intent, or we simply do not have time to work out our course of action

completely. Again, we have to assume that the case we are facing is like others we have seen, and we act on what should happen.

Routine can have great value at junior leadership levels. No matter how smart they may be, junior leaders cannot have the level of experience that senior officers have. Routine can steady junior leaders and guard them against mistaken schemes which can earn them experience at the cost of their soldiers' lives. Mistaken schemes can be found at all levels of command, of course. At Arnhem in World War Two, the Allies launched a major airborne and ground effort against the Germans, predicated on unrealistic assumptions about weak German resistance and Allied abilities to overcome other frictions. While the Allied leaders were hardly victims of routine, their errors in concept, planning, and execution led to greater losses than the Normandy invasion, with much less to show for it.[14]

Routine has one advantage in that constant practice leads to brisk, precise, and reliable leadership, reducing friction and easing the working of the military machine. During and after World War Two the Soviets put great emphasis on battle drill at tactical levels not just because it eased burdens on junior officers, but because operational-level leaders could anticipate the behavior of subordinate units and therefore could concentrate on the plan and the enemy.

Routine loses its utility at the higher levels of war. At the tactical level, we can consider war as an infinite mass of minor events which we can control with greater or lesser

effectiveness, depending on the methods we use. At the higher levels, however, war consists of single, great decisive actions, each of which we must handle according to its own requirements. This is the job of a proper, non-doctrinaire theory of war.

Summary

Routine is a powerful and in some respects useful element of war. But so long as no intelligent analysis of the conduct of war exists, routine will tend to take over even at the highest levels. The danger of this is obvious, as shown by the rapid collapse of France in the face of Germany's new blitzkrieg tactics in 1940. Once an improved theory of war educates the mind and judgement of the senior commander, routine will not reach so high. And, those routines we consider indispensible at least will be based on theory, rather than sheer imitation of past practice.

Chapter Five

On Historical Examples

Our discussion of the theory of war leans heavily on military history. In fact, the whole study of war depends on the use of historical examples. They clarify everything, and provide the best kind of proof. How can we use them?

First, we can use historical examples simply to explain an abstract idea. A brief mention of a case often can bring to life the idea we are illustrating, without having to prove anything. The use of air power against German industry in World War Two could illustrate the entire concept of strategic bombing.

Second, we can use examples to show how an idea could be applied. This requires a slightly more detailed presentation of events, but again not necessarily so much as needed to prove a point. For instance, studying the Schlieffen Plan for Germany's invasion of France in World War One shows how one might conduct a strategic envelopment.

Third, we can use examples to support a statement that some phenomenon or effect is possible. A simple statement of fact usually will do. For example, to show that entrenchments can be effective, we need only cite their use in World War One.

Fourth and last, we can use historical examples in proof of some general truth. This is the hardest to do, and requires laying out the case carefully and in detail. Summers attempts to do this in his book, On Strategy, where he delves into the Vietnam war to prove the United States suffered embarrassment in that conflict because it ignored the fact that war truly is an instrument of policy and never developed supportable objectives.[15] On the other hand, if we cannot provide enough detail in one case, we tend to cite lots of cases to attempt to prove the point. Liddell Hart's book Strategy is just such an effort, using many cases to establish the proposition that the great victories of military history resulted from the indirect approach to defeating the enemy.[16]

It is, of course, easy to use historical examples poorly or even incorrectly, especially when trying to prove some truth. For instance, if one critic uses a dozen shallow cases to make a point, another critic can find a dozen shallow cases to show the exact opposite. Obviously this in no way to reach a conclusion.

Another problem in just touching on history is that critics can use one example to support opposite points. Eisenhower's broad-front strategy against Germany has been called both far-sighted and short-sighted, both determined and weak. These conflicting opinions cannot coexist -- one must be wrong.

Still another disadvantage of merely touching on history is that some readers do not know it well enough to catch the author's meaning. The reader either accepts the argument

uncritically, or misses it altogether. Worst of all is when the writer himself never mastered the events he cites; such superficial, irresponsible handling of history leads to hundreds of wrong ideas and bogus theorizing.

It is especially hard to use historical examples from the distant past. Few contemporary readers will be familiar with the campaigns of Frederick the Great, for instance. More importantly, the further back one goes, the less useful military history becomes. Few details are available for close study. And older forms and methods of war are much different than today's, making it harder to draw lessons for modern use.

Nonetheless, to teach the art of war entirely by historical examples would be a great achievement, one that would require more than the work of a lifetime, and a thorough personal experience of war. Anyone who feels the urge to undertake such a task must dedicate himself to tell, in accordance with the Napoleonic Code, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

ENDNOTES

1. B.H. Liddell Hart, The Ghost of Napoleon (New Haven, Connecticutt: Yale University Press, 1934), 133.

2. Martin Kitchen, "The Political History of Clausewitz, " The Journal of Strategic Studies 11 no.1 (March 1988), 31.

3. Is war an art or a science? The term "art" usually applies to disciplines whose object is the ability to do or create something, such as architecture. The term "science" should apply to disciplines whose object is pure knowledge, such as mathematics or astronomy. Naturally, almost everything we do in life involves both art and science.

Because command is a creative act, it probably is better to say "art of war" rather than "science of war." But neither classification fits perfectly. This is because war is part of our social existence: war is a clash of great interests, resolved by bloodshed. Moreover, unlike the arts and sciences, in war we work against an animate object that acts and reacts -- the enemy. "Scientific" theories of war simply fail to take this into account. Rather than compare war to art or science, we should compare it to commerce or politics; these also are conflicts of human interests and activities. But comparison to politics is best, because war develops directly from conflicts found in politics.

4. The others are assembly areas and bases. Assembly areas are concentrations of troops in readiness for action. At the strategic level their very existence implies willingness to fight, wherever they may be. At the tactical level, their siting determines the basic lines of an engagement, and is a precondition to a defensive engagement. Desert Shield provides an example: the mere fact that ground forces were assembled in northern Saudi Arabia indicated that, at the strategic level, the Coalition was prepared for combat with Iraq. And at the tactical level, if the Iraqis had attacked out of Kuwait, the Coalition's initial defense would have been based on its assembly areas, and the way the troops were disposed in them. Bases are used when troops need more extensive rest, or must perform some function in a relatively secure location. Like assembly areas, bases are strategic in location and size, and tactical in internal organization.

There are, of course, aspects of maneuvers, assembly areas, and bases which are neither tactical nor strategic.

Pitching tents and providing sanitation are not part of fighting itself. It is important not to let these things stray into our study of the theory of war.

5. William J. Lewis, The Warsaw Pact: Arms, Doctrine, and Strategy (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 223-228.

6. Peter Allen, The Yom Kippur War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), 207-209.

7. LTC Peter S. Kindsvatter, "VII Corps in the Gulf War: Deployment and Preparation for Desert Storm," Military Review 72 no.1 (January 1992), 3, 9-11.

8. R.R. Palmer, "Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bulow: from Dynastic to National War" in Makers of Modern Strategy, edited by Edward Mead Earle (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1948), 70.

9. Antoine Henri Jomini, Summary of the Art of War, edited by Lt. Col. J.D. Hittle (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Military Service, 1947).

10. In his critique of Jomini, Clausewitz misses the point that interior lines are temporal as well as physical relationships between enemies. Even if it has to move a greater distance, the side which can move fastest can be said to have the advantage of interior lines. For example, during Desert Storm the defending Iraqis should have had interior lines because they had a shorter distance to cover to meet the Coalition's flanking maneuver. But the Coalition had so degraded Iraqi mobility that the latter could barely move, and the attackers wound up with all the temporal advantages we normally associate with interior lines.

11. LTC Peter S. Kindsvatter, "VII Corps in the Gulf War: Ground Offensive," Military Review 72 no.2 (February 1992), 24-25. According to Kindsvatter, uncertainty remained a factor even after the ground campaign began and Iraqi forces proved incapable of inflicting heavy casualties. Lieutenant General Franks of VII Corps paused after the first day of combat to prevent his divisions from getting strung out during the night, and subsequently hitting the Republican Guard (RG) peicemeal. Franks and his subordinates wanted to be sure that their forces were in good order to destroy the RG in forthcoming engagements, and were not certain how strong the RG would be.

12. Edwin B. Coddington, The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1979).

13. Brian Bond, Liddell Hart, A Study of His Military Thought (London: Cassell, 1977), 37-85. Bond provides a clear critique of the strengths and weaknesses of Liddell Hart's analysis.

14. Cornelius Ryan, A Bridge Too Far (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 63-114, 599. Ryan's work is a case study in how moral factors work for good and ill in war, as well as the pervasive effects of friction.

15. Harry Summers, On Strategy (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982).

16. B.H. Liddell Hart, Strategy (New York: Signet Books, 1974).

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